

NEWS ORLEANS STATES ITEM

Nixon's slighting of congressmen builds opposition on Capitol Hill

WASHINGTON — President Nixon's refusal to permit Secretary of State William P. Rogers to testify on the bombing of North Vietnam now threatens him with this reprisal: a Senate boycott of all his nominations to high diplomatic posts in the second Nixon administration.

The threat is still unstated and will never be spelled out by dovish Sen. J. W. Fulbright of Arkansas, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. But the implicit threat is now accepted as reality by the Nixon administration.

This response is surely regarded by Mr. Nixon as a powder-puff reprisal, reflecting congressional impotence in contesting him on Vietnam. But thoughtful Republicans, both in the administration and in Congress, know that Mr. Nixon's post-election hauteur in handling Congress regarding Vietnam is further eroding his relations with Capitol Hill. By refusing to permit Rogers even to make a token appearance, the President is stocking adversity that could plague his second term.

If Rogers had been allowed to testify, it is doubtful whether the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, with the full consent of conservative Southerners, would now be demanding "commitments" that Nixon appointees agree to testify after they take office as a price of confirmation.

Thus, one of Mr. Nixon's highest officials has quietly informed the White House that Mr. Nixon must allow Rogers to appear before both Fulbright's committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee or Mr. Nixon will risk alienating "all our friends" — Republicans included—in Congress.

This official says privately that once Rogers shows up on Capitol Hill—even if he says nothing—the dozen or so high-level diplomatic appointees will be cleared quickly. "When Bill Fulbright gives his word, you can count on him," he adds.

The list of diplomatic appointments is

headed by Kenneth Rush, moving from deputy secretary of Defense to under secretary of State, and William Porter, emissary at the Vietnam talks in Paris promoted to under secretary for political affairs. The list of ambassadors is long and growing. Not one has yet been scheduled for an appearance before Fulbright's committee.

Fulbright's last public statement on the explosive crisis now building between Congress and the President on the Vietnam war was virtually an ultimatum: either the President gets a settlement in the Paris talks by Jan. 20 or the Foreign Relations Committee begins hearings on end-the-war legislation.

In truth, neither this nor any other committee in the Democratic-controlled Congress can force Mr. Nixon up against the wall. Nevertheless, Fulbright has strongly emphasized the committee's high priority on the end-the-war resolutions, and that requires testimony from Rogers on the status of the Paris talks and the December bombing decision. Mr. Nixon's contempt for the priority has now led to the boycott on nominations.

In terms of day-to-day conduct of foreign policy, Fulbright's reprisal scarcely jolts President Nixon. Rogers need not be reconfirmed as secretary, foreign policy is made at the White House any way and a delay in sending ambassadors abroad is no disaster.

But politically, the new escalation in the White House vs. Capitol Hill war raises tensions in a way some of Mr. Nixon's own men regard as entirely unnecessary.

Thus, one hard-line official in the State Department was astonished that the White House instructed Rogers not to testify last week. A Republican on the Senate committee was not only astonished but angered, asking: "Do they think we Republicans are going to cooperate in making a monarchy out of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue?"